



## **MANAGEMENT TEAM BIOS (February 2015)**

### **GEORGE H. SHELDON Acting Director**

In February of 2015, George H. Sheldon was selected by Governor Bruce Rauner to serve as the Director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

Sheldon was the Secretary of the Florida Department of Children and Families from 2008-2011. When he began working for the agency, it was referred to as "the troubled Department of Children and Families." Three years later, a gubernatorial transition report called it the best-run agency in the state. Sheldon expertly weathered \$200 million in budget reductions without cutting staff or disrupting services to citizens. He was responsible for a \$3 billion budget and workforce of 13,000 employees. Prior to his work as Secretary, he also worked as an Assistant Secretary for Operations.

Most recently, Sheldon worked for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. President Obama appointed him as the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), a position he held for more than two years until November 2013. At ACF he was responsible for strengthening the agency's focus on early-childhood education, finding better ways to support children in foster care, and led the first nationwide strategic plan for victims of human trafficking.

Sheldon was a practicing attorney before his work with child and family welfare, working in private practice and for the Florida Attorney General as a Deputy Attorney General for Central Florida. Sheldon was also a member of the Florida House of Representatives from 1974 to 1982. Sheldon earned his bachelor's degree and law degree from Florida State University.

**DENICE MURRAY**  
**Chief of Staff**

Denice Murray holds a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from Illinois State University, a master's degree in Social Service Administration from the University of Chicago and is a Fellow of the Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice Reform. Denice brings over 35 years of social service experience to this position having served in both the public and private sectors. She was previously the CEO of Chicago Child Care Society, associate executive director of the Child Care Association of Illinois and executive director of Partners in Community Development. She has served in various administrative positions at DCFS, including ombudsman, administrator of the P.A.L. program and most recently as the deputy director of the Division of Regulation and Monitoring.

**ELIZABETH KLING**  
**Deputy Chief of Staff**

Elizabeth was born and raised in Northern Virginia, where she graduated high school and college. After completing her juris doctorate degree at the University of Virginia, Elizabeth held several positions in DC. A move to West Virginia introduced Elizabeth to public service lawyering and she became increasingly interested in the problems facing families and children. She expects that her recent move to Illinois will deepen her commitment to helping not only children but also to strengthening family and community involvement in children's lives.

**ERIKA C. LACERDA**  
**Deputy Chief of Staff**

Erika C. LaCerde is an attorney who is licensed to practice law in Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. She began her career as a prosecutor in Ohio where she also served as a mediator and subsequently a guardian *ad litem*. Erika joined DCFS in 1993 as a bilingual caseworker. She later joined the Office of Legal services to write and research legal briefs for the juvenile court, worked on an assigned juvenile court calendar and systematized the legal screening process to expedite the adoption process to achieve permanency for children in foster care. Erika conducted administrative hearings on service appeals as an administrative law judge, hearing service appeals, expungements and licensing cases. She is currently the deputy chief of staff responsible for the Administrative Hearings unit, ACR, Technical Assistance, Dually-Involved Youth and Family Advocacy Centers.

Erika is a trained mediator in general and domestic relations mediation in Illinois and Michigan. She is a past vice president of the Illinois Association of Administrative Law Judges. She volunteers her time on various boards and is a mentor for the Metro Squash program in Chicago. Erika is a sports enthusiast who successfully coached the High School National Championship Women's squash team from 2005-2010. Her children JuanCarlos and Alexandra are the light of her life and comprise her heart and soul.

**ROBERT T. BLACKWELL**  
**Liaison, Office of Racial Equity Practice**

Bob re-joined the department in 2004 as the regional administrator for the Central Region. He had previously served the department in various central office executive functions from 1984 – 1992. As a staunch proponent of racially equitable treatment for children and families, Bob led Central Region's service delivery for eight years. In 2012, former director Richard H. Calica created the Office of Racial Equity Practice. Bob was tapped to oversee this new office as the liaison for DCFS. In this role, he is responsible for leading the department's efforts in addressing race-based disparities and disproportionality practices and outcomes experienced by children and families of color in the Illinois child welfare system.

Bob holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in social work from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. He serves as the co-chair of Public School District 186's Minority Recruitment Advisory Council, is a member of the Springfield Dominicans Antiracism Team and a member of SCoDR (Springfield Coalition on Dismantling Racism). Bob and wife Carolyn have three daughters and five grandchildren. Bob is a Dominican Associate and worships as a member of Abundant Faith Christian Center.

**CHRIS BOYSTER**  
**Deputy Director, Office of Legislative Affairs**

Chris Boyster is rejoining the staff of DCFS as the deputy director of Legislative Affairs. He returns to this role after having served at the Department on Aging. Prior to working for the state, he served on the Sangamon County Board. Chris received an Associate of Arts degree from Southwestern Illinois Community College and a BA in political science and journalism from Eastern Illinois University. His experience includes an internship in the office of the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers to the President. Chris feels that his work at the department is both meaningful and personal: He has a 22-year-old son who was his foster child; and he and his spouse are in the process of adopting their 16-month-old son.

**KATHLEEN CLARK**  
**Deputy Director, Division of Quality Assurance and Research**

Kathleen Clark has been with the Department of Children and Family Services for 33 years. She began her career as a follow-up caseworker, leaving to pursue a master's degree in social work from Loyola University. Before returning to the department she worked at two private child welfare agencies and in community mental health in caseworker and supervisory capacities. For the last 22 years she has worked in the Division of Quality Assurance and Research as a manager overseeing special review projects, working on accreditation activities, Child and Family Service reviews and Illinois Program Improvement issues. Kathleen is an experienced peer reviewer for the Council on Accreditation and has served as a reviewer for the Child and Family Services Review.

**DEBRA DYER****Deputy Director, Office of the DCFS Guardian**

Prior to her current post, Debra Dyer served for eight years as the chief deputy general counsel of DCFS. In this capacity she directed and supervised the activities of staff attorneys engaged in conducting extensive legal research, writing legal opinions, drafting legislation and department rules and procedures, while assisting the general counsel in the development and implementation of legal strategies designed to minimize litigation risks. Ms. Dyer has also served as an assistant state's attorney in the State's Attorney Office of Cook County. As the lead prosecutor in a juvenile justice/child protection courtroom, she was responsible for conducting trials and hearings, training prosecutors, and managing the day-to-day prosecutorial activities of the courtroom.

Previously, Dyer served as deputy director of External Affairs for DCFS. In that role, she collaborated with internal and external partners; resolved problems and improved relationships with external constituents; and managed the Office of Communications, African American Services, and Latino Services. Dyer has also served as supervisory legal counsel, technical advisor, public service administrator, child protective service investigator, and child welfare specialist for DCFS. She holds a juris doctorate degree from the Chicago Kent College of Law at the Illinois Institute of Technology, a master's degree from the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, and a master's degree in education and a bachelor's degree in social science from Jackson State University.

**DANIEL IBARRA FITZGERALD****Deputy Director, Office of Affirmative Action**

Daniel Ibarra Fitzgerald has had a longstanding career in social services working to ensure brighter futures for children and families. He is currently a deputy director at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and directs the Office of Affirmative Action. Daniel also led the Office of Community Services, was the deputy director of the Division of Service Intervention and served as deputy director of Programs and Services with the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse. He has more than 25 years of experience in child welfare through his work with Casa Central and Youth Guidance. He also serves as an instructor at the Northeastern Illinois University Undergraduate School of Social Work, where he has taught for more than 18 years. He holds a bachelor's degree in social work from Southern Illinois University and holds two master's degrees: one from the School of Business and Management from North Park University and the other from the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago.

**ANDREW FLACH****Deputy Director, Office of Communications**

Andrew Flach has more than 10 years of communications experience in both the state and federal government, including serving as an intern through the Illinois Legislative Staff Internship Program and as communications director for U.S. Representative Randy Hultgren and U.S. Senator Mark Kirk. Prior to joining DCFS, Flach was the communications director for U.S. Representative Rodney Davis in central and southwestern Illinois. He has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**MATTHEW A. GRADY, III****Chief Financial Officer and Deputy Director, Office of Budget and Finance**

Matt Grady is returning to DCFS after serving almost four years with DHS as chief operating officer and a year as director of fiscal services. Matt is a highly respected, decisive leader with 30 years of experience providing fiscal stewardship of local and state government entities complemented by nine years of private industry management experience. Prior to joining the state, Matt served in various finance and accounting leadership roles for two municipalities before his appointment as finance director for the City of Evanston, Illinois. Each year the municipalities received the coveted Government Finance Officers Award for their preparation of the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). He also spent nine years at both General Motors and Ford Motor Companies in their financial departments.

He was recruited by the University of Michigan in Flint while employed as that city's finance director to be an adjunct accounting professor to teach in the evenings in the Master of Public Administration Program. Matt earned his MBA in finance and BSBA in accounting from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He and his wife Lueida have three children and five grandchildren.

**TAMMY GRANT****Deputy Director, Office of Human Resources**

Tammy Grant was appointed deputy director of the Office of Employee Services in September 2013. Tammy began her career with the department in 1990 in Licensing. She then served the Central Region in numerous administrative capacities, including nine years of personnel liaison responsibilities. After serving 20 years in the field, she became an HR specialist with the Office of Employee Services working in Labor Relations. She provided technical assistance to management regarding Labor Relations and was also assigned as the DCFS representative for the Illinois Nurses Association contract negotiations. Tammy brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to this position. She lives in Central Illinois with her two children.

**MICHELLE JACKSON**  
**General Counsel**

Prior to becoming general counsel at DCFS, Michelle worked at CMS as a deputy general counsel. In that role, she served as the primary legal counsel for the Business Enterprise and Veteran Small Business programs. Her responsibilities included advising management and procurement professionals on interpretation of and compliance with all applicable statutes, rules, notices and policies related to government procurement, specifically contracting with businesses owned and operated by minorities, females, persons with disabilities and veterans. She also provided technical advice and legal policy determinations to the Business Enterprise Council. Prior to joining CMS, Michelle served in the dual role of deputy chief of staff and deputy director of human services at DCFS. In that capacity she directed all personnel and labor relations matters and participated in the long-range planning of major department initiatives. Michelle also previously served as assistant deputy general counsel for DCFS. Michelle is a graduate of Jackson State University and DePaul University College of Law.

**PAULA KIENBERGER JAUTES, MD**  
**Medical Director**

Dr. Jautes is a Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Chicago and a board-certified pediatrician. Since 2005, she has been involved at the national level in policy initiatives on foster care and sits on the Executive Committee of the Council of Foster Care, Adoption and Kinship Care of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

She is medical director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, a post she has held since 1993. She helps ensure that Illinois' foster children have access to the health services they require. Dr. Jautes was the first physician in the United States to be named medical director of a state child welfare agency. She has devoted herself to the health and protection of children who are underserved as a hospital administrator, practicing pediatrician and medical researcher, educator, and public servant.

Dr. Jautes received her MD from Rush Medical College, Chicago, and was chief resident at the University of Chicago Wyler Children's Hospital. Dr. Jautes also performed a fellowship in pediatric ambulatory care at the University of Chicago.

**CAROLYN K. ROSS**  
**Deputy Director, Division of Policy and Advocacy**

Ms. Ross has 30 years of experience working in the field of human services. She has developed and implemented programs including prevention and intervention services for youth and families; prevention and addiction treatment for youth and adults; criminal justice diversion programs and community capacity building. Her career began with Youth Service Project, Inc. in Chicago, Illinois serving as an outpatient substance abuse counselor, program director and clinical director during her tenure. She relocated to the Illinois Quad Cities community to work

with the Center for Alcohol & Drug Services in 1990, where she served as an outpatient counselor, program manager and treatment supervisor before her departure in 1995 to serve as the executive director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center in Rock Island, Illinois. She returned to the Center for Alcohol & Drug Services in 2001, to serve as the chief executive officer. In 2009, Ms. Ross returned to Chicago where she joined TASC, Inc. and served as the vice president of operations for the statewide organization. In January 2014, she joined the Department of Children and Family Services as the chief of staff. Ms. Ross is a graduate of DePaul University.

## **MICHAEL RUPPE**

### **Bureau Chief, Operations**

Michael Ruppe brings 28 years of direct service and supervisory experience with the department to his role as bureau chief of Operations, including two months as acting chief. Prior to his appointment, he served as the deputy chief for child protection. He joined DCFS in 1986 as a caseworker, moving up to supervisor positions in child welfare and child protection, as manager of field services, assistant regional administrator and regional administrator in regions across the state. Mr. Ruppe, a licensed clinical social worker, has served as a peer reviewer and team leader for the Council on Accreditation for Children and Families. He has an MSW from the University of Illinois at Chicago, a Bachelor of Science in law enforcement administration from Western Illinois University and an Associate of Arts in general studies from Kaskaskia Junior College.

## **KEITH SCHOONOVER**

### **Deputy Director, Office of Technology and Planning**

Keith Schoonover has nearly 20 years of experience in information technology in both the public and private sectors. His focus has largely been in the healthcare industry, providing innovative solutions to bring value to the business. He is a blended professional who has held both technology and business positions. Prior to joining DCFS, he served as the vice president of business solutions and services at H. D. Smith, the largest privately-held pharmaceutical wholesaler in the United States. Prior to that, he held a variety of leadership roles at the Illinois Department of Human Services, leading different areas of the technology team. Mr. Schoonover holds a bachelor's degree in management information systems from Millikin University's Tabor School of Business. He lives in the Springfield area with his wife and two kids. He enjoys singing, playing guitar, golf and volleyball.

## **LARRY SMALL**

### **Deputy Director, Division of Clinical Practice and Development**

Dr. Larry Small, a licensed clinical psychologist (Psy.D), serves as deputy director for the Division of Clinical Practice and Professional Development. Larry began his tenure with the department in 1997 as the program administrator of the statewide Psychological Assessment and Consultation Program. Over the years, Larry has played an integral role in the creation and development of the department's front-end Integrated Assessment and multi-disciplinary Child and Youth Investment Teams. In 2003, Dr. Small drafted the first national child welfare practice

guide and policy for department staff and community professionals serving our gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning (GLBTQ) youth. As associate deputy director for the Office of Behavioral Health, Larry led programmatic responsibility for infusing the department's Family-Centered, Trauma-Informed, Strength-based Practice Model to all placement and intact child welfare staff through implementation of the Learning Collaborative and Field Support Programs.

### **CYNTHIA L. TATE**

#### **Deputy Director, Office of Child Well-Being**

Cynthia Tate has more than 20 years of experience as a clinician, administrator, educator and consultant. Dr. Tate has served as a consultant to the Illinois Department of Human Services, where she was the co-developer and professor of the Leadership Development Institute and to major case management initiatives for the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois, and was a consultant to the Governor's Task Force on Human Service Reform. She was also the co-founder of a behavioral health managed care company, developing and managing its professional operations and has served on the faculty of the Illinois School of Professional Psychology. Dr. Tate most recently served as a special assistant to the commissioner for the Georgia Department of Human Services. Dr. Tate holds a bachelor's degree from Fisk University and a doctorate degree in clinical-community psychology from the State University of New York at Albany.

### **GEORGE VENNIKANDAM**

#### **Acting Deputy Director, Division of Regulation and Monitoring**

George Vennikandam has been appointed as the acting deputy director of the Division of Regulation & Monitoring. Since June 2012 and until this new appointment, Mr. Vennikandam was serving as the associate deputy director of the Central Office of Licensing, Enforcement and background check units under the Division of Regulation and Monitoring.

Since February 2008 and until May 2012, Mr. Vennikandam served as the acting deputy director of the Division of Child Protection of DCFS. From December 2006 to September 2011, he also served as assistant to the DCFS director. Mr. Vennikandam joined DCFS in 1995 after 16 years of supervisory and management experience in social service and corporate settings. At DCFS, he served as an intact family caseworker, substitute care supervisor, field services manager, site administrator, regional program manager, acting regional administrator, administrator of Cook County POS monitoring and statewide ILO/TLP monitoring, associate deputy director of the Division of Monitoring and Quality Assurance and acting deputy director of the Division of Monitoring and Quality Assurance.

Mr. Vennikandam holds a master's degree in sociology from the prestigious Kerala University, India, and a master's degree in social work from Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, also affiliated with Kerala University, India.



**WILLIAM WOLFE****Deputy Director, Office of Procurement and Contracts/Acting Procurement Officer**

Bill Wolfe's public service career includes serving as a member of the Taxpayer Action Board, managing deputy budget director for the City of Chicago, and most recently as deputy director for Planning and Performance Management at DCFS. Prior to entering public service, Wolfe worked as a management consultant and as a staff and line manager in private industry.

Career shaping experiences include working with startup companies, managing 4000 employees as country manager for Saudi Arabia for Waste Management, leading Waste Management's effort to put power plants on landfills, leading strategy, cost reduction, and reorganization efforts at Combustion Engineering and as a consultant for McKinsey and Company. Wolfe has a Bachelor of Science degree in finance from Indiana University, read politics and economics at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, and is all but complete on his dissertation in economics from the Stanford Graduate School of Business.